

The gap between male and female life expectancy has grown since 1950. This differential between the sexes is wider for North Carolinians than for the nation as a whole. For example, In North Carolina the difference between white male and female life expectancy in 1950 was 6.4 years, with the difference for nonwhite males and females being 4.3 years. By 1980, this difference had increased to 8.5 years for whites and 9.7 years for nonwhites. Nationally, the difference between white males and females in 1950 was 5.7 years and 3.8 years for nonwhites. In 1980, the U.S. difference between white males and females stood at 7.4 years with the difference for other races being 8.3 years of average life expectancy at birth.

Nationally, life expectancy at birth has improved substantially since 1950. White males have gained 4.8 years and white females have gained 4.0 years during this 30 year period. Nonwhite males have gained 4.2 years and nonwhite females have gained 7.3 years of average life expectancy during this period. While the gap between whites and nonwhites in terms of life expectancy has narrowed somewhat, average life expectancy for nonwhites still lags behind that of whites. For example, in 1950 nonwhite males could expect to live an average of 7.4 years less than white males at birth. Similarly, nonwhite females could expect 9.3 fewer years of life at birth than white females. Much of these differences are attributable to higher death rates among other races at specific ages (i.e., higher infant mortality). By 1980, however, the gap between whites and nonwhites in terms of life expectancy had decreased. This gap has decreased for women faster than for men. Thus, in 1980, nonwhite males could expect to live on average 5.4 years less than white males, and nonwhite females could expect to live on average 4.5 years less than their white counterparts.

In North Carolina, life expectancy recently has been slightly lower than the national average for males and slightly above the national average for females regardless of race. The relative differential in 1980 is similar to what it was in 1950. This still represents an improvement during the last decade, since during the 1960's and 1970's life expectancy increased for the nation as a whole more rapidly than for North Carolina.

Life tables for single years of age by race and sex groups are presented in Tables 2-10 of this report. Those unfamiliar with reading life tables should review the following section titled "Life Table Value Descriptions."